DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 378 464 CG 025 845

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TITLE The Importance of Counselling Support for Business Managers in a Crisis Situation.
PUB DATE [91]
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, October 14-20, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrators; Adults; *Adult Students; *Career Counseling; Client Characteristics (Human Services); *Continuing Education; Continuing Education Centers; Counseling Effectiveness; *Counseling Techniques; *Counselor Client Relationship; Foreign Countries; Human Services; Stress Management

ABSTRACT

The adult educator in the non-degree management studies of a university is frequently approached by business managers whose expectations include the obtaining of educational solutions to their career problems. This places a demand not only on the educational expertise of adult educators but also on their educational counselling skills, as compared to personal or career counselling. This paper considers the counselling of adults prior to their registering for courses in the non-degree management studies of a university. Traditional face-to-face contact is assumed between the manager and the adult educator in the locale of the office of the adult educator. Some of the suggestions offered for adult educators to become effective counsellors include: (1) Be familiar with the current literature; (2) Possess a thorough knowledge of courses/programs/seminars in the non-degree area of responsibility; (3) Possess in-depth knowledge of management needs in the business world; (4) Understand the environment and the community in which the client lives; and (5) Have an unbiased institutional approach when it is necessary to refer a student to another institution. The adult educator's effectiveness depends on quality counselling of business managers for the intended and expected outcome where managers live and learn. Contains 12 references. (BF)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF COUNSELLING SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS MANAGERS IN A CRISIS SITUATION

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The Importance of Counselling Support

for

Business Managers in a Crisis Situation

By
Joseph P. Paolucci

In a recent ABC TV National Quality Forum IV, Newsman Sander Vanocour stated, "Quality Control is going to save this country in an increasingly competitive world." Don Petersen, chairman of Ford Motor Company asserted, "We thought making quality our number one priority was by far the best way to serve our customers." Coby Chandler, Chairman of Eastern Kodak observed, "Obsolescence of skills is happening at a very fast pace." John Akers, Chairman of I.B.M. Corporation confided, "It comes down to understanding what it is you're about and having a pursuit of excellence that is real."

These statements attest to the trend in business where institutions are summoning additional effort, utilizing previously unused skills to survive. Institutions ultimately rely for this effort on the performance of the individual, either singly or cooperatively. The greater the efficacy of the individual, or group of individuals, the greater the expectation and resulting performance.

With the education of adults, within the context of the university, it is the quality performance of the individual adult educator who parallels this situation. Here research or excellence in teaching or the performance of those activities which contribute to the achievement of excellence, all contribute to outstanding performance.

The adult educator in the non-degree management studies of a university, is frequently approached by business managers whose expectations are the obtaining of educational solutions to their career problems. This places a demand not only on the educational expertise of adult educators but also on their educational counselling skills (as compared to personal or career counselling). This situation presents a unique challenge to the adult educator. This challenge can be a tremendous opportunity for advancement of our skills as adult educators or it may become a serious impediment to accomplishing the goal of adult education, which is the effective meeting of the educational needs of adults. The goal of adult education, as a standard of achievement, implies that the right to educate adults must be matched with the obligations that go with it. This suggests that, in counselling business managers, we open our minds and our hearts to the lives of others. It also highlights our reliance on faith in the growth and development of both ourselves and that of our fellow men and women.

The university system is not presently responding adequately to these unique needs, or as they are capable of doing. Jack Blaney (p. 77) expressed this perspective in the February 1986 issue of the Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education:

"We have certain understandings and skills which can help the university respond to major changes in our society, such as demographic shifts, substantially changed patterns of earnings degrees and diplomas, the increasing needs for career change, and burgeoning competition from the private sector. The universities will need to be more responsive to societal change and we can help".

What is significantly important about change today is that these changes are frequently rapid, extensive and all pervasive when they occur. Some of the causes underlying this may include technological, organizational and economic factors, to name a few. They impact not only on organizations but also on individuals within them. These unpredictable changes frequently precipitate the notion of crisis in the minds of business managers experiencing them and are perceived to require immediate action. While an accurate prediction of their reoccurrence is not possible, society, as a whole, is currently subjected to those continual changes. In this sense, the likelihood of their reoccurrence, with their resulting impact, seems certain. In these circumstances, there would appear to be a continual need for effective quality counselling. When business managers approach adult educators in management studies, the latter may be called upon to deal with critical, real-life, career problems. Today universities and business communities are seeking greater cooperation in the solution of shared problems. The opportunity is present for universities to respond with excellence to educational solutions for business managers experiencing career problems.

Consider the background from which the business manager emerges. The expectation most managers grew up with is seldom the same as at their time of crisis. Managers generally, (like those in professions or other walks of life) do not receive formal education on managing career change as is frequently experienced today. Managers have not incorporated study leave compared to those in academic life. Most managers are too engrossed in the myriad details required to develop competence and skills necessary to

personally and economically survive in their competitive world. Occasionally competent managers may be in a situation where promotion is contingent on obtaining knowledge and skills through education. Today's way of life places individuals in a world of specialization. They are more mobile. They function by performing definite roles rather than as total personalities as was found in the traditional family situation. Life is more complex compared to the traditional family presence where there was always someone at home to talk to, to be sympathetic and understanding. There is greater isolation and alienation of the individual. Individuals are faced with a greater number of choices due to life's changing situations. Similarly management as a skill, is not the same today as it was ten years ago. Management has undergone considerable growth and development since that time. This calls for new styles and techniques of management. It places the manager in a position where the need for solutions or the management of problems, is the motivating factor in their approaching the university.

We are considering the counselling of adults prior to their registering for courses in the non-degree management studies of a university. Traditional face-to-face contact is assumed between the manager and the adult educator (for the personalized attention it provides) in the locale of the office of the adult educator. We also assume with Delight E. Champagne,(1987 p.63-77) that career-counselled adult students may benefit

through counselling. The terms Continuing Education and Extension Department are used synonymously. The term "problem solving" is interpreted to be "problem management" since it refers to problems in living and not mathematical problems.

What is the meaning of the word "crisis"? The frequently used interpretation is a person in a stressful situation who seeks help because they are unable to cope with them alone, or a person being at a turning point. In this sense a crisis is a time for decision. The Chinese character that represents the word "crisis" means both danger and opportunity. It is an opportunity because during times of crises, individuals are more receptive to therapeutic influence. Here we are using the term "crisis" in the restricted sense that it is employment-related crisis, the solution of which may be resolved through education. W. Brock Whale (1987) clarifies this concept. "An accumulation of knowledge is the basis from which people conceptualize opportunities, problems and issues. Specific conceptualization is the basis for action and is also the basis for searching out specific knowledge needed to act effectively."

Counselling is not to be confused with advising. Advising, according to the New World Dictionary (Simon & Schuster) is "the making of recommendations as to a course of action by someone with actual or supposed knowledge and experience." Norman Hill (1981 p.13) defines personal counselling as a "perspective as well as a set of skills". Goldie R. Kaback (1968 p.29) defines counselling as a "systematic

exploration of self and/or environment by a client, with the aid of a counsellor, to clarify self-understanding and/or environmental alternatives, so that behaviour modification or decisions are made on the basis of greater cognitive and effective understanding." This assumes the adult is sufficiently independent and responsible to be able to make a decision or develop a plan of action in managing his/her problem during the counselling process, which can be actualized at a later date. This criteria reflects the situation and intent in this discussion.

Norman Hill's definition of a counsellor (1980 p.2) is "anyone who assists in interpersonal problem-solving." Elizabeth Singer (1983 p.4) states that a counsellor must possess "some qualities of a mentor, a close, trusted and experienced guide who can provide information and psychological support to adults interested in continuing their education." A key point is that the client must perceive the counsellor to be this.

The role of a full time counsellor implies a level of professionalism. What is meant by professionalism is the activity of a person who has specific training and skills in counselling. Adult educators are neither full-time counsellors nor professionals in counselling. Where special circumstances warrant (as described below) the adult educator should recognize the distinction between what is the valid area of responsibility and properly the realm of quality educational counselling as an adult educator and what is properly the realm of a professional counsellor. We are concerned here with the specific expertise of the adult educator within the sphere of responsibility as it relates to the business manager

seeking educational solutions to his/her career problems. Problems pertaining to that portion outside this area of responsibility and skill, should be referred to a professional counsellor.

In any given crisis situation there will be intermingled with it personal and emotional issues the client must deal with. We are focusing here solely on the educational issue. At what point should the adult educator refer problems to a full time professional counsellor? I would propose that this point is reached when the educational component for the resolution of the manager's problem does not meet the needs of the individual within the adult educator's area of responsibility, knowledge and skill. The objective is to assist the manager to obtain the most appropriate selection of studies most suitable for the manager's career development. It is useful to recall Dalmar Fisher's (1981 p.326) comment, "the ability to counsel another person is one of the most valuable skills a member of an organization can possess" Such a skill, if properly developed and executed, will greatly enhance the role and effectiveness of the adult educator, and ultimately impact on the goal of adult education. In my view, by providing quality service to our clients, this has broad implications beyond the university itself and extends into the

community. In the eyes of the community, this provision of quality service enhances the image of the university. It also benefits the business community directly by providing more effective employees and managers.

What characteristics should the adult educator have to become an effective counsellor in counselling business managers in a crisis situation? Following are some suggestions:

1. Be familiar with the current literature in personal and educational counselling and to know the principles involved and basic approaches to counselling. A holder of a certificate in counselling skills, or its equivalent, could be an asset.

2. Possess a thorough knowledge of courses/programs/seminars in the non-degree area of responsibility, with the ability to translate course/program objectives to meet adult learners needs and interests, as applied to each individual situation. That is, to provide that insight into the relationship between the program/course offerings and the educational needs of the manager who will require them and use them in his/her future responsibilities. In other words, adult educators must interact, innovate and create to an extent as never before. Frank R. Di Silvester explains (1981 p.198) "the translation of knowledge and issues into effective practice is the keystone of

counselling adult learners." Jack Blaney (1987) elaborates, "We need to ensure that our extension programs make a patient statement about our university's distinctive mission and service to the community".

3. Possess indepth knowledge of management needs in the business world. "Universities should visit some businesses and industries and talk with their people about continuing education needs and how they could best serve them." Jerold apps. (1981 p.240). This is current practice.

4. Understand the environment and the community in which the adult client lives. As A. Gartner and F. Riesman stated (1974 p.186) "The stated ability to know what is going on in the social setting and to set the correct emotional tone first are crucial life outcome criteria." Because the environment and the community activities are dynamic, this requires keeping "up to date" on current activities which impact on adult education in the community.

5. Apply a professional attitude with such characteristics as objectivity, confidentiality and patience, to name only a few. "Patience or response delay, as psychologists would call it, is a human characteristic that seems essential for many life outcomes. Kagan, Pearson and Welch (1968) have shown that it is an easily measured human characteristic that is relatively stable over time and

can be taught directly." Gartner, Greer & Riesman (1974 p.187). These skills can be acquired formally or informally, and be developed by adult educators.

6. Extensive knowledge of human nature, of adult characteristics and adult learning, with a genuine interest in solving career/educational problems for managers in a career crisis.

7. Have an unbiased institutional approach when it is necessary to refer a student to another institution or college: that the adult educator be an impartial and independent broker in this instance. The essence of this question is not so much the accumulation of knowledge; it is the skill to which this knowledge is applied in managing inherent problems.

Several questions come to mind. Does the Extension Department policy support the role of counsellor? Does the adult educator have the time for counselling? What importance is given to this activity? Are these objectives achievable by an adult educator whose other responsibilities bear heavily on time and effort? Should the organizational structure accommodate this in areas of responsibilities or by some other method? It is my opinion that the integration of the counselling role of an adult educator impacts on the service provided by the extension department and the university to the community it serves. Lifelong learning is a necessity for business managers. They look to the university for the management of their educational problems, and perceive this as a necessary

function of the university. Patricia Cross (1981) states this position. "Lifelong learning is not a privilege or a right; it is simply a necessity for anyone, young or old, who must live with escalating pace of change in the family, job, country and in the world." The consequences of the position the university takes, in the effective education of adults, will become apparent in the community as we move through the 1990's. How the community will measure the effectiveness of a university will be in assessing outcomes. Teresa MacNeil in "Challenges and Opportunities in Canadian Adult Education" comments: "the test of effective learning is the outcome and not in the amount of teacher contact hours or volume in a text book." The one who is in a position to respond to this is the business manager who must use knowledge, inspiration, creativity and skill to survive in the business environment. From the viewpoint of the business world, Colby Chandler, Chairman of Eastman Kodak in TV National Quality Forum IV states, "Customer satisfaction is the state in which customer needs, wants and expectations are met, resulting in repurchase and loyalty." In the academic world where business managers' needs, wants and expectations are met, quality results frequently take the form of support for the university and loyalty to it over time.

The adult educator's effectiveness depends on quality counselling of business managers for the intended and expected outcome where managers live and learn. The university, through the Extension Department, can meet this challenge through development of its own polices and procedures or expressed in another way, through its own culture; that is, the way

the university works with its members to establish and achieve a particular set of goals. It is a sense of mission about whom should be served and how and to give quality performance in doing so.

Our power lies in our sensitivity to human needs. We need to open our minds and our hearts to the lives of others. We have a great opportunity, as adult educators, through the realization of the importance of counselling skills available to us, to become more effective adult educators who better serve the business community. The special needs of business managers offer a unique challenge for adult educators.

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